VATICAN II: A "*CRISIGENIC*" COUNCIL WITH AN UNWRITTEN AGENDA*

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ABSTRACT

The Second Vatican Council was like a new Pentecost which John XXIII invoked upon the Church. The Council emphasized a pastoral renewal that required attitudinal as well as structural change. Pieris offers the "Council" of Jerusalem as a precedent: it also dealt with a crisis that called for a conciliar decision. Since then, Vatican II is the first council to make *crisigenic* decisions which triggered both a *caesura* from the euro-ecclesial domination and a renewal in theology, spirituality, and sacramental life. Reform is from the center, renewal from the periphery. Fidelity to the Council demands maintaining the momentum of renewal at the periphery, so that the local churches become a "sacrament of salvation" and complete the Council's unwritten agenda

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Introduction: Don't Waste Time on Vatican II

Rahner's Advice to the Young

It was a great and rare privilege, as I see in retrospect, that my theological studies (1962–1966) not only coincided with the years of Vatican II but took place in one of the most scenic and salubrious locations in a suburb of Naples, only "two hours" ride by *rapido* (the fast train) from Rome, where the Council was in session. We enjoyed meeting, at leisure and in person, some of the *periti* (experts) of the Council who loved to spend a weekend with us in the hope of basking in the beauty of the Bay of Naples or reveling in the vibrant view that the volcanic Vesuvius offered the visitors. Prominent among such guests was Karl Rahner, who had also been officially invited to deliver the *lectio brevis* (inaugural address) at the beginning of one of our academic years. I remember how, during an unofficial visit, he lingered with us long after the postprandial recreation, speaking off the cuff about the inside story of Vatican II.

In the course of this enlightening conversation we questioned him about our role in the implementation of the Conciliar decrees. He prefaced his lengthy answer with a startling advice: "Don't waste time on Vatican II!" That tedious task of expatiating on the Conciliar texts and justifying the Conciliar decrees on the basis of the authentic tradition of the Church was going to be his mission, because, as he adverted prophetically, his own contemporaries, "the older generation to which he belonged, including some of the bishops who signed the documents," would find it well nigh impossible to grasp the totally new perspective within which the Council was formulating its message. If this new orientation was not recognized, the teachings of Vatican II could be misinterpreted along the beaten track of a theology, which it was trying to leave behind as inadequate.

It would seem, as I guess now retrospectively, that Rahner foresaw a conflict between the traditionalists and the renewalists *in the very reading of the Council's teaching*. The documents would contain compromises and contradictions that would have to be explained away in terms of the overall perspective of the Council. Failure to do this would bring about Babel of confusion, a veritable language barrier within the Church! For the Council was opening new perspectives without having at its disposal a new language capable of communicating those perspectives in a consistent idiom. There was, therefore, a real danger that the old vocabulary employed by the Council would lead to an

interpretation that would run counter to the *new spirit* it was breathing over the whole Church.

Note that John XXIII, who convoked the Council, was a Church historian. He was able to relativize so many "traditions" that submerged "*the* Tradition" to which he wanted the Church to be faithful.[1] He felt that these obsolete traditions spoke an *obsolete language* which had failed to communicate the Good News, which Christ and his Church together constitute for all people. Only Christ's own Spirit who dwells within and without the Church could decide in *synergy with* that same Church ("it seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us" [Acts 15:28]) how to speak in a language that each nation and culture could hear and understand *in its own tongue* (Acts 2:8)! It was a Pen- tecost that he invoked upon the Church. "Come Holy Spirit and renew the face of the Church" he seemed to have prayed. He did not believe there was any other way to bring about an *aggiornamento* (updating) of the Church. That, indeed, was the origin of Vatican II. That was also the aim of Vatican II.

But *aggiornamento*, in his perception, could not be achieved by declaring new "dogmas" (in the sense of defined doctrinal formulae), which, some maintained, were required to stem the tide of modernist heresies allegedly sneaking into the Church, but by introducing a *pastoral renewal* that required an *attitudinal* as well as a *structural* change in the whole Church. This approach was totally different from anything we had witnessed so far in the history of the major councils. Most councils introduced *doctrinal clarifications* against heterodox tendencies or *institutional reforms* that left the Church structurally unchanged. In this Council, however, the method adopted by the Spirit *and* the entire Church was unprecedented: they took several *crisigenic decisions*, aimed at total renewal, as will be explained later.

The Dynamics of the Council

Rahner's advice *to us*, therefore, was straightforward: Instead of dissipating our energies on the exegesis of the Conciliar texts, we should get ourselves saturated with the *spirit* of the Council by *entering fully into its ethos while it was still in progress* so that eventually we could *move forward* building on what it proposes along the new perspectives it was opening up. It was, of course, not difficult at all to get ourselves immersed in its ethos, as Rahner bade us do.

1. On the question of traditions and Tradition, see Yves M.-J. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

For, this Council had become such a colossal event for the whole world, that even the secular dailies covered the debates and disputes that determined the dynamics of Conciliar decrees as these decrees began to assume their current format out of a chaos of crises and compromises including Vatican intrigues and papal interventions, not to mention smear campaigns whirling both in and outside the *aula magna* (the main assembly hall).[2] The media reported them with crude lucidity and we read them with fierce avidity!

It was not, therefore, Vatican II as the "end-product" of a process, but Vatican II as "the process itself," that Rahner invited us to master. For, the task of our generation was to proceed from where the Council would leave us. Vatican II, he insisted, was not a point of arrival, but "a point of departure" (*punctum a quo proficiendum est*, to quote his own words!). In other words, our mission was to complete its unwritten agenda by means of a theopraxis that is commensurate with its new orientation. I took this counsel as my lifetime program in the company of many others. This is a story yet to be written, though I have already provided a glimpse into this adventurous period elsewhere.[3]

My humble advice to those who have come long after us and are not familiar with this historical process of the Council, is that they study its teaching with the help of the *Acta Concilii* (Minutes of the Council so to say). A slow motion replay of the process that created this Council can also be read in *The History of Vatican II* (edited by Giuseppe Alberigo, Orbis and Peters), which, at the time of my writing this article, has already reached Volume IV, covering the period, September 1964 to September 1965. Apart from this historical background, the texts of the Conciliar documents may mean very little. For, in the formulation of the Conciliar message, there are minor contradictions and compromises, which, as in scriptural exegesis, have to be resolved contextually in the light of the history of the debates and discussions that marked their genesis.[4]

2. Yves M.-J. Congar, *Called to Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 34.

3. *Dialogue*, NS, XXV–XVI (1998-1999) 265–92.

4. But those who do not have access to these sources, can at least see Part I of the four-part BBC documentary *Absolute Truth*, where some of the architects of the Council (Konig, Heeley, Kung, and so on) are seen and heard recalling in detail the cross-currents that preceded and accompanied this unique event.

Part One: The "Council" of Jerusalem as a Precedent

The Crisis that Called for a Conciliar Decision

The only precedent that could explain the nature of Vatican II, at least to some extent, is the event described in Acts 15:1–29 and referred to in recent times as the "(First) Council of Jerusalem." There are several features in this episode that resonate with what we know of Vatican II. I am aware, however, that it is temerarious to equate the two "councils" in every aspect. Besides, the very term "council" is applied only analogically to the Jerusalem meeting. Therefore, the comparison made here serves purely as a pedagogical technique to help the readers to move from the known to the unknown.

A careful reading of the report in Acts 15:1–29 reveals the occurrence of a two-fold crisis in the nascent Church. The first was the crisis that occasioned the convocation of a council. The second was the crisis that the council itself occasioned. It is the gradual and painful resolution of the second crisis that eventually eliminated the first altogether. This is also the procedure noticed in the case of the origin, the process, and the aftermath of Vatican II. But in the case of the latter, the second crisis remains to be resolved even after four decades due to a counterforce operating in the center of the Church during the last quarter century or more. This explains why the first crisis is still hurting and haunting the Church.

Let me take up the first crisis in the nascent Church. It was something of which the center, that is, the Church in Jerusalem, was blissfully and of course, quite understandably, ignorant. The emissaries (*apostoloi*) such as Paul and Barnabas, who had firsthand knowledge of the frontier situation, apprised the center that a crisis was brewing on the periphery (Antioch), partly because the traditionalists from the center who visited the periphery had tried to impose their rigid opinion (no salvation without circumcision) on that local Church, creating an uncalled for dispute and disturbance there, provoking the members of that local church to send representatives (Paul and Barnabas) to Jerusalem to settle the question (see Acts 15: 1–2).

Even at that Council, which was convened in Jerusalem to resolve this crisis, the traditionalists insisted on the status quo despite the positive reports that the two missionaries brought from the frontier (vv 4–5). Fortunately there was an important sequel that opened the mind and heart of the center: a lengthy debate; and a bold intervention by Peter, the leader of the whole Church, who appealed to his own faith-inspired experience of the crisis as

well as of its resolution (vv 6–11). This created the much needed atmosphere of silence (v 12), which allowed Paul and Barnabas to put their case before them in detail and with clarity. Even James, the leader of the conservatives, yielded to the demand from the periphery; thanks to Peter's support (vv 13–21).

Thus the pillars of the Church—Peter, James and John—openly upheld new pastoral policy, and, as Paul recalled later, "Their only request was that we remember the poor, which is the very thing I have spared no pains to do" (Gal 2:10). The poor, according to that Conciliar decision, took priority over the mere question of traditional practices. (This is important to remember also with regard to Vatican II. When he announced the Council, John XXIII expressed his dream of a "Church of all, especially of the poor.")

This decision of the Jerusalem meeting was then followed by a serious attempt at what we would call today the reception of a council; messengers were sent to the periphery with the good news, instructing the churches about the new pastoral policy (Acts 15:30–31). All unnecessary burdens were removed; a few simple dietary habits that would not alienate the Gentiles from the Jews as well as a general insistence on sexual morality were all that was expected from the neo-converts (Acts 15:28–29). It was these "practical ordinances adopted by the Apostles" as *ta dogmata ta kekrimena ton apostolon* that are technically referred to in Acts 16:4.

Here, we see the original scriptural use of the word "dogma." This term indicated a practical ordinance (also see Dan 2:15; Lk 2:1; Eph 2:15; Col 2:14) and certainly not a doctrinal reformulation of a revealed truth to be assented to under pain of excommunication (anathema). The purpose of that Council was not to "teach new dogmas" (in the sense we have come to understand dogmas from the catechisms of today and from the history of later councils) but to propose new ordinances demanded by the signs of the time (dogmas meant by the apostles). The authority to bind and loose, or permit and forbid (Mt 18:18) reflects a first century Jewish understanding of the authority, which the Rabbis had, of deciding what practices should be followed by the community, or to use a much later Jewish idiom, to "determine *halakah*."[5] In Mt 18:18-20, Christ transfers this (rabbinical) authority to his own disciples. It is in the light of this observation, that one may safely assume that Acts 15:28–29 ("it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" presents a clear instance, in which the apostles and the Holy Spirit acting as co-authorities sent on a mission by Christ had determined *halakah*, i.e., proposed new pastorally practical policies, technically known in the Scriptures as *dogmata* (Acts 16:4).

5. David Stern, introduction to the *Jewish New Testament* (Jerusalem, 1989), xxiii.

The Crisis Occasioned by the Conciliar Decision

The aforementioned *dogmata* or "pastoral ordinances" were by nature *crisigenic*. For they revealed an option for something so novel that a crisis of dissent would become the cost as well as the means of that renewal. The abandonment of a sacrosanct practice believed to have been sanctioned by Divine Will as well as by a hallowed tradition of twenty centuries (according to Jewish reckoning) could appear temerarious if not blasphemous.

Furthermore, every "praxis" is a tacit formulation of a "theory." So was also this new praxis recommended by the Council of Jerusalem. It had concealed a new theological position, namely, that the ritual observance of circumcision is not necessary for salvation; for it is "the circumcision of the heart in the Spirit" that incorporates one into God's family (Rom 2:29). This argument is further developed to its logical conclusion: not just the circumcision, but the whole legalistic observance of the Torah, of which the circumcision is a mere part, is equally incapable of bringing salvation or justification, which comes only from one's trust in Christ Jesus (Gal 2:15–3:14).

The matter does not end here; this theological reflection could be extended also to the Christian rite of baptism, in that it could not be circumscribed in a (sacramental) ritual, but has to be understood as "Christian discipleship" consisting of immersion in the death (and the resurrection) of Christ, as Paul would argue (Rom 6:3–4), since that was the only sense in which Jesus applied the term "baptism" to himself (Mk 10:38–39 and parallels).

In other words, the pastoral decisions of the Jerusalem Council were responsible for a further crisis in the communities because of the attitudinal as well as structural changes such pastoral decisions elicited from a community of faith. The Book of Acts, from 21:15 onwards, describes this second crisis at great length, with ruthless clarity and in shocking detail. The letter to the Galatians hints at some compromises that the leadership itself had made later in the face of opposition by the traditionalists.[6] What provoked the crisis was the scandal, so to say, which the doctrinal and social consequences of the new praxis had created in the minds and lives of conservative Jewish believers in Christ.

In the struggle to resolve this crisis, the reception of the Council among the Jewish believers in Christ merged with something even greater: the reception of the message of Christ among the non-Jews of the whole world. Christianity

6. I am assuming that Gal 2: 11—15 refers to the crisis that resulted from the Council rather than the crisis that called for that Council.

would have remained a mere Jewish sect or faded away into Judaism had it not been for this *crisigenic* decision of the Council of Jerusalem. It enabled the message of Christ to become truly Good News for all people of good will everywhere on earth. Today, I am writing these lines as a "gentile disciple of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus" precisely because that *crisigenic* decision of the Jerusalem Council released the Gospel from the domination of one nation, one culture, one language, one tradition.

Karl Rahner has quite aptly described the Jerusalem decision as a *caesura*, a "neat break" from a culturally narrow past, and expected Vatican II (which he assessed as the first ever Council of the "World Church") to forge a similar *caesura*, i.e., a radical rupture from the West.[7] For the frontier ministers of the local churches from the four corners of the world had brought their hopes and fears to the attention of the universal church assembled at the center! The authentic fruit of the Second Vatican Council had to be a loosening of the monolithic ecclesiastical institution that the Roman communion had been petrified into; that is to say, a structural change that would accommodate a noble pluriformity in terms of gender, race, culture, and language; in short, the release of the universal Church from the domination of one hiero-patriarchal local church that had, for centuries, imposed itself on others as the one and only catholic (= universal) Church.

Perhaps we should add one more observation: Vatican II is also the first ever council since the meeting of Jerusalem to make *crisigenic* decisions, which not only brought about the long overdue *caesura* from the euro-ecclesial domination, as Rahner had observed, but also triggered off a chain of new beginnings in almost every sphere of theology, spirituality, sacramental life, and social praxis. It was a council of renewal, not a council of reform.

Part Two: Some *Crisigenic* Declarations of Vatican II

The Nature of a Crisigenic *Decision*

I have heard François Houtart offering the following example to spell out the sociological significance of a *crisigenic* decision. He cites the hypothetical case of a football club, according to whose unquestioned tradition, the captain of the football team was automatically recognized as the president of that football club. However, in the course of time, it had introduced many

7. Karl Rahner, "Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40 (December, 1979): 716–27.

"institutional changes" that mildly modified its make-up. In other words, while constitutionally retaining its identity as a football club, it decided to introduce other forms of sports (such as table tennis, cricket, volley ball, squash, and so on) one after the other, as part of its activities. These institutional reforms did not affect the structure of the club radically. It continued to remain the football club, which it had always been.

Suppose, one day, the members were to gather in their constitutionally authoritative assembly and decide to redefine themselves as a "Sports Club" (rather than as a football club) in respect of the reality which they now constitute thanks to the changes they had introduced in a constitutionally valid manner! If that were to happen, then we have an instance of a *crisigenic* decision. For once this decision becomes constitutional, an unforeseen crisis erupts like a volcano, creating a violent upheaval among its members. Many non- footballers might question the traditional right of the football captain to be the president of the club, which, now, is no more a mere football club; and so also with similar claims of other office bearers. For their self-understanding has changed radically. This new awareness is now going to unleash a massive crisis of identity in the former office bearers. I heard the following illustration from Houtart in one of his seminars conducted in Sri Lanka a few years after Vatican II:

> These officials would argue quite rightly, of course, that their legislative assembly did not discuss the roles and functions of members as being subject to change and, therefore, that such a demand for change in the roles and functions of members would be unconstitutional. But the rest of the members would point out, also quite rightly, that the redefinition of the society has constitutionally implied a redefinition of roles and functions within that redefined society! In this conflict, some of the past members might insist that this was not what they meant when they voted for the change; others would rather leave office and perhaps even leave the club altogether.

A *crisigenic* decision, without which no renewal is possible, cannot achieve its objective save by forcing the institution to pass through a dark corridor of dissension and confusion thanks to the efforts of renewalists to redefine the roles and functions of its members, even at the cost of departures ("schisms") from its membership.

This is more or less the story of Vatican II. Unlike, say, the Council of Trent, which opted for mere institutional reforms, this Council (intent as it was on radical renewal) flung the Church into a stormy period of contestation,

after awakening it from its "dogmatic slumber." After all, its convener, the good Pope John (as he was fondly referred to in his day) envisaged it as a Pentecost. The first Pentecost was a tumultuous event assuming the form of "a violent wind" and "fiery tongues" (Acts 2:2–3). The newness was so radical that, to the unawakened ones, the disciples seemed a delirious set of drunkards (v 13). But the result was astounding: what used to be racially, linguistically, and culturally a uniform community of believers became intelligible and credible to the nations and gradually evolved into a truly catholic Church sending its roots into a diversity of cultures.

Vatican II, to use this same analogy, was a Pentecost of violent renewal, thanks to its far-reaching decisions, which contained an implicit imperative to change the whole Church structurally and attitudinally with regard to its lifestyle and worship, its ministry and theology, so as to be a credible witness and a readable sign before the contemporary world.

There was more than one *crisigenic* decision made in the Council. Some of these, to use the Latin jargon heard frequently among the Council fathers, were made *ad extra*, i.e., in terms of the world outside the visible boundaries of the Church and others resulted from an inward perception (*ad intra*). I shall take one *ad intra* redefinition for a detailed study and then mention two others briefly.

Vatican II: Three Examples of Crisigenic *Decisions*

(a) The most critical change, which carried the authority of an ecumenical Council according to the renewalists, was its implicit redefinition of roles and functions (e.g., of the pope, bishops, priests, vowed religious, papal nuncios, and even the Vatican). Such a redefinition of roles and functions was not the explicit aim but the indirect outcome of the Council's *crisigenic* decision: the decision to redefine the Church as the People of God. In other words, the Church, which had traditionally defined itself in terms of its *androcratic* hierarchy (Greek for "male-dominated holy power-wielders") has now begun to perceive itself as the inclusive community of the one priestly people, the *laos* (whence the word "laity")![8] This invitation to flatten a pyramid built up and consolidated during a period of little less than two millennia created a crisis in at least four areas:

The first casualty of this decision was the male clerical priesthood. The re-appropriation of the neotestamentary belief in the one priesthood of Christ, the Head and members of the Church taken in its entirety, has repositioned

8. This "small step" taken by the Council Fathers was "a big leap" for the *whole* Church, opening a door to Council Mothers to enter the decision-making process in future synods!

the clerical ministry in its original setting of the presbyterate. The presbyter represented a non-cultic leadership role within the sacerdotal or cultic "People of God" (the *laos*, the laity),[9] who truly formed the worshipping community of co-priests and co-victims united with the priest-victim Christ. Therefore, the post-conciliar liturgical reforms tried to respect the language, the customs, and the active role of people.

Thus, the former lines of demarcation that clearly separated the laity as non-priests and the presbyter as "the priest" ranking high above the former seemed to fade away. "What then did my sacerdotal ordination confer on me, which the laity does not already have?" asked many a "priest" formed in the pre-Vatican II seminaries. There was an identity crisis brewing in the face of the new contours that were reshaping the roles and the functions of the ministers in the context of the Conciliar ecclesiology. A mass exodus of priests in the post-conciliar decade was the unavoidable consequence of this *crisigenic* decision.

The second casualty was the religious who had vowed to live the "evangelical counsels." They had been formed to think that they were a class of perfection-seekers exempt from the secular distractions of laity. The Council, on the contrary, saw that the holiness to which the Church (i.e., the People of God) is called by God is universal, that is to say, a holiness that is not hierarchically stratified (from top to bottom) but charismatically diversified within that one universal call, which every Christian receives as part of his or her baptismal priesthood. Evangelical obedience ("God alone") and evangelical poverty ("no other god") which sums up the spirituality of every Christian proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount, entails a pure, i.e., a single-minded and undivided commitment to the service of God and neighbor according to one's vocation (i.e., chastity both marital and celibate). These are all expressions of a baptismal commitment![10]

"What then did my religious vows confer on me, which I had not already received at my baptism?" was the question that disclosed the identity crisis of those men and women who thought that marriage was the creator's concession to ordinary people enfeebled by their flesh and that as celibates they were elevated to the higher life of the Spirit. The mass exodus of consecrated men and women in the sixties was the other inevitable sequel to this redefinition of roles and functions within the Church.

9. The word laity however, is used in a very loose sense in the Conciliar documents, often as the counterpart of the ordained ministry.

10. For a theological elaboration of this post-Vatican II understanding of religious vows, see chapters 16 and 18 of Aloysius Pieris, *Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996).

The difference between the bishop ("overseer") and the presbyter ("elder")—whether it is merely jurisdictional or also sacramental—became the third area of conflict. The question had surfaced in the Council itself and the stop-gap solution it has offered in its documents is still being hotly debated. I recall some bishops giving interviews against this alleged confusion of roles when the new liturgy that grew out of Vatican II allowed the priests to sit on a "throne" while presiding over the worshipping community, something traditionally thought to be a distinctive episcopal prerogative. Even such trifles were capable of discomposing some hierarchs.

The most revolutionary change expected from the Council is the redefinition of the boundaries between primacy of the Pope and the collegiality of the bishops. Church reunion or ecumenism depends on the credibility, which the Church of Rome projects to the separated Christians by the way it relates to other local churches which are already in communion with it. Here, the role of the Vatican dicasteries and the nunciatures has to be redefined so as to function as mere instruments of a church-government which is collegially exercised by both the papacy and the episcopate rather than continue to be an autocratic power that invokes the authority of the primatial See of Rome to control the bishops and their churches, notwithstanding the Council's declaration that all local churches are self-governing bodies (Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches, no. 5).

This also raises two other questions: first whether the Roman synods should continue to be what they are now, namely, a mere papal institution where bishops are given only a consultative role; secondly, whether they serve purely as an arena for power-sharing between the papacy and the episcopate, with no mechanism to ensure that the entire people of God representing the local churches (without gender discrimination) enter the decision-making process.[11]

(b) There is also an *ad extra* decision, in which the Council redefined the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. This simple formula contained a revolutionary missiology, which relativized the Church vis-à-vis the Reign of God, polarizing the theologians in their understanding of the mission-mandate of the Risen Jesus (Mt. 28:19) and of the role of the traditional missionary. The Vatican II, which was blamed for the exodus of priests and religious, was also criticized for creating a crisis on the missions.

11. Aloysius Pieris, "Two Things there are Your Holiness: Suggestions for the Next Pope's Agenda in Line with John Paul II's Invitation in *Ut unum sint*," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41.3 (2004): 288–309.

As in the previous instance, here, too what really occurred was an invitation to redefine things along the new perspectives and acquire the new vision of evangelization. This new vision led to a wholly new theology of religions. The Asian theologians as well as the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) have elaborated this implicit missiology of the aforementioned redefinition. A call for a new interpretation of the notion of "conversion" demanding a new missionary policy is heard from the frontier apostles from Asia, like the call that Jerusalem once heard from Paul and Barnabas. The center-periphery conflict on this matter is yet to be resolved, as one may infer from *Dominus Iesus* issued by the Congregation for Doctrine and Faith (CDF) and the response it received worldwide as well as from the Jacques Dupuis case.[12]

c) *Dei Verbum* can be cited as another document that contained a *crisigenic* decision. It made a profound difference in the understanding of the Church vis-à-vis the other (separated) churches. Just as the Church was relativized in terms of God's Reign, in the earlier example (b), so also, here, not only the Church but even its magisterium was explicitly denied any authority over the Word of God, to which it had to subordinate itself (*Magisterium non supra verbum Dei est, sed eidem ministrat*). Despite its many compromises and shortcomings, this document has boldly enthroned the Word of God in the center of Church-life.[13] Some, of course, accused the Council of having given in to Protestantism, while others (as for instance, the French Jesuit review *Etudes*) dared to celebrate the promulgation of *Dei Verbum* as the end of the anti-Protestant Counter-reformation.[14]

The first casualty of this *crisigenic* decision was the traditional scholastic theology of the Tridentine era, which found highly vocal advocates in the curalists already during the council. Stanilas Luonnet of Rome's *Biblicum*, once suspended from teaching by the Holy Office (the present CDF as it was called then) and later reinstated by Paul VI, was free at last to propagate what he was once censured for. His lectures widely heard during the post-conciliar decade in different places brought out the sharp contrast between the biblical message couched in the Semitic idiom and its Hellenistic distortions in traditional Western theology.[15] There was a worldwide movement towards revising the Christian heritage in the light of biblical soteriology.

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12. I have discussed this matter in "Roman Catholic Perception of Other Churches and Other Religions after the Vatican's *Dominus Jesus*," (2001:207–30).

13. Enzio Bianchi, "The Centrality of the Word of God" in *The Reception of Vatican II*, edited by G. Alberigo et. al. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 115–36.

14. Congar, *Called to Life*, 35.

15. This is amply demonstrated in his lectures given in 1968 to the Italian Biblical Association, and published as *Il Nuovo Testamento alla luce dell' Antico*, Paideia, Brescia, 1971.

Biblical soteriology revolves around God's Covenant with the oppressed slaves of Egypt, a Covenant made new in Jesus, Who is at once God and the Poor in one person. The role of the poor in the salvation of the world together with the "this-worldly" dimension of biblical spirituality began to challenge a traditional model of doing theology. The Church of the Poor envisaged by John XXIII began its birth pangs. The poor, who are Yahweh's covenanted partners, came to be revered and served as the subjects of history. As for me, the finest fruit of this *crisigenic* decision was liberation theology, which the poor of Latin America created in the course of hearing and responding to the Word as they heard it in the Scriptures and in contemporary history. This was a long overdue discovery of an alternative to the domination theology that a non-biblical scholasticism had produced. The polarization between the two theologies continues, and the crisis has not eased as one may infer from at least two declarations that the CDF issued on this theology.

This same biblical soteriology emanating from Latin America has had a profound and lasting impact on many theologians of Asia, where, too, one has witnessed the emergence of various bands of political theologies.[16] On the other hand, true to Asia's own character, its theologians have taken *Dei verbum* as a point of departure for a Christian encounter with the Word in its many scriptural religions.[17]

Conclusion: The Art of Resolving the Post-Conciliar Crisis

Crisis-Resolution in the Pre-Vatican II Era

History records many renewalist movements that affected the Church as a whole. The pattern observed, as evident from the examples given below, can be described as dialectical. The thesis is a leadership-crisis in the institutional Church. It is a crisis precisely because the center tends to see it as crisis of obedience rather than a crisis in its own credibility. The desire for change becomes an organized movement on the fringes of the Church, where the frontier apostles meet the challenges of the Word spoken outside the Church's visible confines. The antihesis is a desperate and disproportionate reaction to this attitude of the center. It might take the guise of a "breakaway" movement. Then comes the synthesis: someone or some group from the fringes

16. For a documentation on these theologies, see Aloysius Pieris, "Political Theologies in Asia," chapter 18 in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, edited by Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh (Oxford: The Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), 256–69.

17. Aloysius Pieris, "Christhood of Jesus and the Discipleship of Mary: An Asian Perspective," in *Logos* 39.3 (2000): 102ff.

brings the positive elements of the centrifugal movement back to the center. This centripetal integration of the breakaway movement ends up as a reform accepted by the Institution, which, however, remains structurally unchanged. Thus a "renewalist current," which always takes place on the periphery, can be eventually baptized into a "reform movement" on being appropriated by the institution of the Church!

The earliest recorded instance is the desert movement of the fourth century. Already in the pre-Constantine era many non-Christian groups such as the stoics had started contesting what the Apocalypse had referred to as the attractive Beast: the Roman Imperial mode of being, thinking, living, doing and organizing. Christians were warned by the Master: among you it shall not be so (Lk 22:25–27), pointing perhaps to Roman officials parading about in pomp and purple. Once Christianity succumbed to that very temptation, even the holy sacraments gradually became a remote control apparatus of a clericalized order of "holy power-wielders" (hierachs) decked in imperial splendor, these being the sole mediators of salvation for the laity. The contestation quite understandably came from the fringes of the Church itself. There was a stampede to the desert in search of authentic Christianity. It was a lay movement and it spurned the rituals into which the sacraments had degenerated, and the clericalism into which presbyterate had been reduced. Fortunately, however, intuitive persons such as Pachomius, Basil, and much later Benedict drew a *cenobitic* communion out of this eremitical individualism and reformed the Church by creating within its structure a place for a lay monastic life, serving as a dialectical counterpart of the hierarchy.

This story is repeated in the case of the Waldensians who broke away from the scandalously affluent Church which had been seduced by the emergent mercantile capitalism. They preached the gospel to the poor, whom they gathered into communities. These communities challenged the Roman Church so effectively, that its leadership softened its earlier obduracy and became better disposed to receive, in Francis of Assisi, an ecclesiastically acceptable version of that movement. What the institution thus accepted in the new mendicant order was, obviously, a reform.

The corruption of the rank and file of the 16th century Church registers a similar example. A commission appointed by Paul III in 1536 drafted a memorandum which admitted with unusual frankness the large scale corruption of the clerical class. The most accentuated breakaway movement that reacted to this crisis was the "Protestant Revolt." But a contestation was also fermenting on the fringes of the Church in the works of Erasmus, Louis de

Vives, Melanchthon, Savanarola, to name a few. Many attempts at a centripetal appropriation of centrifugal movements were resorted to by Bendecitines and Francsicans in several centers of Europe. The *devotion moderna* was one such renewal movement. What Ignatius did in establishing the Jesuit Order was not a counter-reform, but a project of personal renewal or "re-conversion" of Catholics to an authentic Christian discipleship. This is what *reformatio* in Latin meant in early Jesuit writings, though in the Tridentine usage it designated legislative changes enacted by the hierarchy affecting church-government.[18]

In all these instances a renewal, which had always erupted violently on the periphery, often creating rupture from the center, is re-appropriated by the center as a reform. This is the classical method of resolving not only an institutional crisis which provokes an anti-institutional renewalist movement on the periphery, but also the crisis that such a renewalist movement itself pose for the institution itself.

The spirit of Vatican II, however, does not seem to accord with this procedure, in which a radical renewal originating on the periphery is received by the center as an institutional reform. The centerperiphery conflict in these post-conciliar times is, in part, the result of not recognizing this difference.

Resolving the Post-conciliar Crisis in the Spirit of Vatican II

The uniqueness of Vatican II is that, in its origin and its development as well as in its conclusions, the whole Church was moved by an enthusiasm for a radical renewal rather than a mere reform. Renewal moves from the periphery to the center, whereas, reform trickles down from the center to the periphery. The one is smooth and the other stormy. The fact that so many *crisigenic* decisions were made in this Council's documents demonstrates its option for renewal, which by its nature is a fringe-phenomenon. The Council's option for renewal right at the center of the Church hides an unwritten agenda to be discovered and executed on the periphery. The commitment to maintain that momentum of this renewal on the frontiers of the Church is exactly what fidelity to the Council as well as the reception of the Council means for us today. The center, which tends to fall back on the reform model, must be constantly challenged to respect the renewalist agenda of the Council.

Note, therefore, the difference between the two methods. In the classical model described above (section 7), the renewal had been enforced on

18. J. W. O'Malley, "Attitudes of the Early Jesuits towards Misbelievers," *The Way Supplement* 68 (Summer, 1990): 64–65.

the Center by the periphery and eventually received by the center as a mere reform. In the case of Vatican II, the process is reversed. The initiatives on the periphery are officially received by the center as its own unwritten agenda for renewal. The center, therefore, can only make *crisigenic* decisions; for, the diversity on the periphery does not allow the center to "legislate renewal," which is a contradiction in terms, since what is universally legislated can only be a mere reform. The Christians of each locality, therefore, are summoned by the supreme authority of the Ecumenical Council, to take the initiative locally and become a "sacrament of salvation" in the socio-cultural context it has been placed by divine providence.

Unless the center and periphery agree on this program, there is going to be a conflict between them. This conflict is not an excuse for the abandonment of the renewal program envisaged by the Council but constitutes the very context in which that renewal has to be forged. The center can be influenced by anti-renewalists who are appalled by the redefinitions of traditional roles and functions and by the paradigm shift which appears to them almost heretical. Their contestation can force the center to recapitulate. The Lefebvre case illustrates this. Paul VI excommunicated that faction for not complying with the Spirit of the Council's renewal. Before long, however, the center was torn between the need for renewal and the risk of schism. Despite the consequent recapitulation, as we see in so many reformist decrees and warnings emanating from the center (on liberation theology, eastern meditation, and now on liturgy) the execution of the Council's unwritten agenda is quite evident on the periphery, not in the form of a schismatic defiance but as an exercise of faith in the Spirit that summoned Vatican II and as an act of fidelity to its *crisigenic* decisions.

This means that the center-periphery conflict has to be resolved at the periphery, where alone a renewal movement can be sustained without being tamed into a reform. The survival of the Council's renewalist project depends not only on the local churches of the periphery, but also on the periphery of those local churches themselves! The frontiers of the frontiers have a major role to play in making explicit what the Council implied, that is to say, to complete its unwritten agenda!

The Vatican document *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, like others of its kind mentioned above, is a reformist response to a renewal process taking place at the frontiers of the Church. What seems a liturgical abuse to one is a

liturgical renewal to the other as we see in the contestation that is coming from the periphery against this document.[19]

In this context of the center-periphery conflict, we witness two types of breakaway movements, quite different from the ones we described in section 7. The first is a schismatic movement such as that of the Lefebvrists who have rejected Vatican II as the work of mod- ernist heretics. By contrast, the second type of breakaway movements results from the failure to implement Vatican II. The stampede of Catholics to "churches" of fundamentalist sects points to the failure on the part of the local Catholic Church to renew every aspect of its ecclesiastical life in accordance with Vatican II: reorganizing its ministry, reshaping the lives of people on the basis of the Sacred Scriptures, celebrating liturgies that speak from and to the depth of the Spirit that operates the day-to-day lives of the people, making the gospel values transparent in the leadership, and so on. There is only one answer to this problem: an unswerving perseverance in the execution of the Council's unwritten agenda.

This agenda of the Council will remain with us as a perpetual legacy. The process of renewal, which it envisages for the Church, is endless. In its documents we hear a repeated call for a non-stop renewal (*renovare non desinat*) with the frequent use of Latin verbs *renovare*, *reformare*, *purificare*, and *mundare* qualified by expressions such as *continuo* (continuously), *incessanter* (unceasingly), *perennis* (perpetual), *indesinenter* (uninterruptedly), *de die in diem* (day in and day out), and so on.[20]

Vatican II is a great adventure that must engage every new generation until persistent renewal becomes our second nature and thus ceases to be a source of a center-periphery conflict. If the "Roman" Synods are re-organized as a perpetually available forum for this renewalist agenda, in the manner I had suggested earlier (Part II, no. 6), then Vatican II could very well be not merely a lasting council, but also the last of the councils.

19. See e.g., "Diritto di assenso: Le communita christiane popolari di Granada contro il docmento sugli abusi liturgici," *Adista*, 50 (anno XXXVIII) supl. al num. 5784, 3 July 2004, 14–15. See also Aloysius Pieris, "A Liturgical Anticipation of a Domination-Free Church: The Liberating Story of an Asian Eucharist," in *Vision for the Future: Essays in Honour of Tissa Balasuriya*, edited by B. Silva et al. (Colombo: CSR, 1997), 69–82; reprinted in *The Month* (November 2000): 428–35.

20. See *LG* 7, 8, 9, 11, 15; *UR* 4. 6; *GS* 21 etc.

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